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Soviets Allege American's Role In Spy Killing

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MOSCOW—The Soviet government yesterday accused an American posing as a diplomat in Moscow of involvement in the murder of an innocent Soviet citizen who stood in the way of an espionage ring run here by the Central Intelligence Agency.

The charge was leveled at Martha D. Peterson, a former vice consul in the U.S. Embassy here, who was described as a CIA agent who transmitted the poison used in the killing. The alleged victim or the spy who carried out the execution were not identified.

[Sources in Washington confirmed that Peterson, 33, was employed by the CIA. The State Department, confirming she was expelled, issued a statement saying "it was alleged that she engaged in inappropriate activities." It added that she is on leave.]

The accusation in the government newspaper Izvestia alleged that Soviet counterintelligence agents uncovered the plot last year when they intercepted Peterson as she was about to transfer espionage gear, including two poison capsules, concealed inside a fake rock to her unidentified contact. Among allegedly captured items were photographic equipment and money.

"It was found out during the investigation that the poison transmitted to the spy earlier had been used to kill an innocent Soviet citizen who stood in the way of the spy's criminal activities," Izvestia said.

While U.S. Embassy sources refused to comment on the allegations, they said that Peterson worked in the embassy from autumn 1975 to July 1977 and that following her departure she was declared persona non grata by the Soviet government. Officials refused to provide any additional details except to say that she had been "detained briefly" by Soviet police before her departure.

The extraordinary accusations published on the front page of Izvestia appear to be a response to recent American disclosures that Soviet eavesdropping gear had been discovered secreted within the U.S. Embassy chancery here. They also seem to be linked to the arrest in New Jersey of two Soviet citizens accused of espionage.

Izvestia clearly indicated that its revelations came after the "American

side" violated an unwritten understanding under which the two sides refrained from publicizing each other's espionage actions.

[Sources in Washington said it was true that the current charges back and forth between Moscow and Washington represent a departure from past practices in which espionage operatives using diplomatic or quasi-diplomatic cover were expelled quickly and without publicity.]

Izvestia's harsh language underscores the growing distrust now permeating relations between the two capitals as the Carter administration scrutinizes its basic attitudes toward Moscow and sounds repeated notes of warning to the Soviets both about the terms of a new strategic arms limitation agreement and Soviet military involvement in Africa.

Over the years, both governments have accused each other of harboring spies among their diplomats and many diplomats have been expelled on espionage grounds.

A trial is now under way in Newark, N.J., involving the two Soviets accused of conspiring to pass U.S. Navy secrets to Moscow.

Izvestia's accusations of CIA poisoning are virtually without precedent. It tied the allegation to an attack on CIA Director Stansfield Turner's congressional testimony saying the CIA no longer condones or supports political assassinations.

"How to tally Turner's public statement with the practical work of his agency?" Izvestia asked.

The long article, mixing sarcasm and contumely with purported facts, leaves many major questions unanswered in a confusing pastiche. It was written by Yulian Semenov, this country's most famous spy novelist and author of a recently widely hailed television series about how Soviet agents prevented the United States from making a separate peace with Hitler during World War II.

The article said Peterson was involved in an effort to obtain information and falsify it "to stop detente."

It said she was seized last July 15 after elaborate efforts by her to evade surveillance and deposit the espionage rock in an arch of a well-traveled bridge over the Moscow River so it could be retrieved by the anonymous spy.

It said that when she was apprehended "she started shouting, 'I am a foreigner.' Obviously the vice consul was shouting so loudly to warn the spy who was coming to the appointment place about the danger."

The newspaper published two photos, one showing what it described as the contents of the hollow rock and the other of Peterson and U.S. Consul Clifford Gross sitting at a table with items from the rock spread before them.

Semenov wrote that on the night of July 15, Peterson drove herself to the center of Moscow, changed from a white dress to black trousers "in a poorly lit place" and took a bus, trolley, subway and taxi before she "finally hurried to the bridge" spanning the Moscow River at Lenin Hills "and put an ordinary-looking stone in a loophole in the arch. It was there that the vice consul was detained."

The rock was opened in the presence of Peterson and Consul Gross. It "proved to be a cache, containing cameras, gold [a] large sum of Russian money and a phrase book, microphone and instructions." The two poison capsules "and special instructions on how it should be used also were found."

The following day, Ambassador Malcolm Toon was summoned to the Foreign Ministry, and handed a protest note, said Izvestia, alleging that U.S. "special services were pursuing subversive pictures on Soviet territory, using the diplomatic cover of the embassy, and using such means as poisons."

After the meeting, said the paper, "the ambassador said the U.S. would be grateful if what happened would not be made public. The ambassador assured that he would do everything he could so that this kind of incident should not be repeated. Considering

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the man representing the U.S. government could not be irresponsible about what he was saying, the Soviet side did not make the affair public.

"But now it has become clear that the U.S. has not taken any steps to stop that kind of activity. The scandal concerning 'Soviet spying' has been authorized."

Izvestia also named Robert Fulton, Jay K. Gruner and Serge Karpovich as "implicated in the espionage." Sources here said Fulton was a political officer from July 1975 to July 1977 and routinely reassigned to Washington. The other two made a brief visit here in November 1975.

Peterson, whose husband was killed over Laos five years ago while serving as a Navy pilot, has been assigned to Washington. Officials said she is currently on leave.

While linking Peterson to the alleged death of a Soviet citizen, Izvestia did not identify her accomplice but left the impression that he was a Soviet citizen who provided information to the CIA.

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